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MILTON'S OF EDUCATION

BY ELBERT N. S. THOMPSON

In the middle of the seventeenth century, when the intellectual world was teeming with new and disquieting pedagogical theories, no taint of radicalism could have been detected in the opening paragraphs of Milton's modest, eight-page pamphlet, *Of Education*. Turning contemptuously from the "many modern Januas and Didactics" to the sounder works of "old, renowned authors," Milton defines the aim of education in the time-worn phrases of the church. "The end then of learning," he explains, "is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection." Surprisingly orthodox this must have sounded after his bitter denunciation of the bishops and his heterodox theories on divorce. Doubtless, the definition would seem less arid then than now, to a people still apt to express its deepest feelings in the language of theologians. It would be just as suggestive of the needs of Puritan England as another statement on education: "nothing can be more necessary to principle the minds of men in virtue, the only genuine source of political and individual liberty, the only true safeguard of states, the bulwark of their prosperity and renown."¹ But even here, where the glow of Milton's personal convictions is more evident, there still is nothing subversive of the accepted teachings of Plato and Aristotle. Was the arch radical, then, of the Puritan Revolution a conservative thinker on problems of education?

Milton's interest in pedagogy was probably first aroused by his own experiences in St. Paul's School and at Cambridge, and by his reading there in "old, renowned authors," among them Plato and Xenophon, to whose "divine volumes" he had been led by "riper years and the ceaseless round of study and reading."² The classics were for him a source of knowledge and a stimulant to

¹ *Second Defence*, P. W., 1, p. 259. 1654.

² *Apology*, P. W., 3, p. 119.

independent thought. But current events, also, attracted Milton's thoughts to England's schools. The Short Parliament had proposed the establishment of an academy in London "for the breeding and training up of young Noblemen and Gentlemen," and the Long Parliament, as early as 1641, listened favorably to the proposals of Comenius.³ Among the busy reformers of the schools Samuel Hartlib, Milton's personal friend, was the most zealous. He drew Comenius to England; he showed an interest in each idea of reform as it was advanced; and, in "those incidental discourses" alluded to by Milton, he prompted the poet-teacher to write the little tract *Of Education*. So Milton's life-long interest in education was the outgrowth both of his love of ancient civilization and of his contact with the men and affairs of his own day. The model school that he planned was to be "likest to those ancient and famous schools"; but it was to meet also the needs of the modern world. He sought the authority of classical authors, as he did for even the most radical of his doctrines, but he would interpret that authority in the light of modern experience.

Milton's *Tractate* starts with purely destructive criticism of "the many mistakes which have made learning generally so unpleasing and so unsuccessful." Provoked by the interruptions of the frequent saints' days, which were especially obnoxious to Puritan reformers, Milton objected to the "too oft idle vacancies" in the life of the schools. Faulty methods, too, rendered much of both teachers' and pupils' efforts futile; seven or eight years, it is said, were spent "in scraping together so much miserable Latin and Greek, as might be learned otherwise easily and delightfully in one year."⁴ Equally profitless was the study of the universities, with its prime stress on logic and dialectic—"an asinine feast of sow-thistles and brambles."

The *Tractate on Education*, however, was neither the first nor the last of Milton's pronouncements on the subject. In one of the rhetorical essays delivered by Milton at Cambridge, he directed his criticism against the dominant scholastic philosophy. It seemed to him dull and uninteresting compared with the inspiring pursuit of poetry, history, and oratory, and altogether fruitless compared with the useful learning gathered from the study of natural science.

³ Adamson, *Pioneers of Modern Education*, pp. 182, 97 ff.

⁴ *Of Education*, P. W., 3, pp. 465.

To the enthusiastic eulogy of these more delightful and profitable studies Milton returned in a later college oration.⁵ "There is an infinitude of things besides," he avers of the material world, "a good part of which might be learnt before I could have enumerated them all." To this is added the significant thought: "And what additional pleasure it is to the mind to wing its way through all the histories and local sites of nations, and to turn to the account of prudence and of morals the conditions and imitations of kingdoms, states, cities, and peoples." Here is found in germ all of Milton's mature thoughts on education. First, on all these subjects he was willing to defer to the authority of the ancients, especially Aristotle. Secondly, he insists on the importance of a knowledge of real things, as opposed to mere adroitness in the use of words. Thirdly, he shows his belief that learning can be, and must be, utilized in public service. While he was still resident at Cambridge his ideas on pedagogy had fully crystallized.

Milton never wavered in his belief that the orthodox discipline in grammar must yield place in the modern curriculum to the study of realities. "Language," he asserts, "is but the instrument conveying to us things useful to be known. And though a linguist should pride himself to have all the tongues that Babel cleft the world into, yet if he have not studied the solid things in them, as well as the words and lexicons, he were nothing so much to be esteemed a learned man, as any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother dialect only."⁶ Hence, true education, even in the university, must begin with sense experience—"with arts most easy, and those be such as are most obvious to the sense." And finally, "because our understanding cannot in this body found itself but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible, as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be followed in all discreet teaching."⁷ No sense-realist of modern times could speak more positively.

For this doctrine Milton found ample support in the theories, if not always in the practice, of past times. Plato believed that edu-

⁵ *Prolusiones Oratoriae*, 3, 7. See Masson, *Life of Milton*, 1, pp. 281 ff., 297 ff.

⁶ *Education*, P. W., 3, p. 464.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 466, 464.

cation for children should be a sort of play, and that abstract studies should be deferred until real things are learned.⁸ Comenius based his reforms on the same principle—things before words. The advice of Vives was: “no language is in itself worth the trouble of learning,” the student’s aim being to acquire “facts and ideas.”⁹ In England Richard Mulcaster, Spenser’s teacher at the Merchant Taylors’ School, took the same position.¹⁰ “We attribute too much to tongues,” he wrote, “in paying more heed to them than we do to matter.” Bacon was of the same opinion. “Scholars in universities come too soon and too unripe to logic and rhetoric. . . . For minds empty and unfraught with matter, and which have not gathered that which Cicero calleth *sylva* and *supellex*, stuff and variety, to begin with those arts, . . . doth work but this effect, that the wisdom of those arts, which is great and universal, is almost made contemptible.”¹¹ Finally, William Petty, in his answer to Milton’s pamphlet, wrote: “it would be more profitable to boys to spend ten or twelve years in the study of things, and of this book of faculties, than in a rabble of words.”¹² The aim of all these educators, Petty excepted, was to infuse into the rigid educational discipline then in vogue the liberal, cultural ideals of early humanism.

As an indication of this same trend back to older ideas, Milton’s brief description of his model school is significant. He proposed to erect an academy in every city in England, or at least to convert “a spacious house and ground about it” to academic uses. In each house one hundred thirty boys were to be housed and educated under the care of twenty attendants and instructors. Special schools would still be needed for the advanced study of law and medicine; but ample instruction in all other subjects would be given in the academy proposed. The establishment of such local schools in England would dispense with the need both for the private tutorial instruction that so many gentlemen had provided for their sons and for the removal to a distant university center.

Such schools had long been known in Greece and Italy. Plato

⁸ *Republic*, Book 7; *Laws*, Book 7.

⁹ *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, 4, 1.

¹⁰ *Educational Writings of Richard Mulcaster*, p. 219.

¹¹ *Advancement of Learning*, Book 2, Spedding’s ed., p. 326.

¹² *The Advice of W. P. to Mr. Samuel Hartlib*. 1648. *Harleian Miscellany*, vol. 6.

in the *Laws* recommended public instruction for young men, and Xenophon in the *Cyropaedia* exhibited most convincingly the beneficial results of such training. The early Italian humanists of the fifteenth century, following this Hellenic tradition, organized schools and mapped out fit courses of instruction for them. The most famous of these institutions was established by Vittorino da Feltre at Mantua. And Vives, in the sixteenth century, advised the erection of academies throughout the country, in places where food was plentiful but where the distractions of large towns and the dangers of foreign invasion were not felt.¹³ But already some Italian gentlemen had preferred a private education for their sons. Quintilian, at all events, saw fit to refute the arguments advanced for the employment of private tutors.¹⁴ He saw in the life of a school an emulation for the pupil and a stimulus for the teacher that could not be enjoyed in the privacy of the home. This view generally prevailed in Italy, where a compact social organization offered natural opportunities for the development of public schools. Milton's plan, then, for an academy was in strict accord with Hellenic tradition and the ideals of the early Renaissance.

In England, however, a markedly different social order led to the adoption of other ways. The English noblemen lived usually in seclusion on their own estates, and the private tutor was a familiar figure in their households. Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Gouernour* depicts this private training most attractively, and even Milton, the London scrivener, employed a fit tutor for his son, John Milton, before entering him at St. Paul's School. Gradually, however, conditions changed. One remembers that Roger Ascham, tutor to the Princess Elizabeth and Lady Jane Grey, wrote the *Scholemaster* for the improvement of public instruction. Bacon, likewise, using some of the arguments of Quintilian, spoke positively in favor of the public school.¹⁵ And of course practical schoolmasters, like Richard Mulcaster and John Brinsley, were loyal to their profession. Their preference, naturally, was for the day school, and their care was for its betterment. But the day school for the common people and the academy for higher born youth had gained at least a theoretical acceptance in England before

¹³ *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, 1, 2-3.

¹⁴ *Institutes*, 1. 2, p. 21, Bohn's edition.

¹⁵ *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Liber 6, c. 4.

Milton opened his school in London in 1640. Again one sees how in Milton's treatise the tradition of the ancient world and the sentiment of his own day converged.

The course of study outlined for this model school is really staggering in its inclusiveness. The languages prescribed were Latin and Greek, Italian, Hebrew, and something of Chaldean and Syriac. In science the boys were to advance from arithmetic and geometry to geography and astronomy and such applied sciences as agriculture, engineering, and architecture. To these subjects Milton added, for their moral value, the ethical works of Cebes, Plutarch, Plato, Xenophon, Quintilian, and Cicero. Through these pagan moralists the boy would form his own character. Next, his attention was to be turned, in economics and politics, to the affairs of the state. Finally, toward the end of his schooling, poetry and prose, with those "organic arts" logic and rhetoric, were to be taken up. In general, the course gave little time to the humanities for their own sake, and tended strongly toward the useful.

Such an encyclopedic array of studies seems preposterous. Did the author stop to consider the capability of the ordinary boy when he wrote: "Ere this time the Hebrew tongue at a set hour might have been gained; . . . whereto it would be no impossibility to add the Chaldee and the Syrian dialect?" But Milton in his own little school actually carried the scheme into execution. Under his uncle's instruction Edward Philips followed a course of study every bit as comprehensive as that of the *Tractate*. Of course, Milton did not plan for thorough instruction in all these branches of study. His nephew received only the slightest introduction to Chaldean and Syriac, and, since special schools were to be provided for law and medicine, the mere rudiments of those sciences fell within the scope of the academy. But, even with this qualification, Milton's proposal seems beyond all reason.

From it the reader, accordingly, turns back with a sense of relief to the simpler, more purely cultural, aims of the Greeks. Aristotle specified as the essential branches of learning, reading and writing, gymnastic, music, and drawing. Plato's scheme was just as simple. Later, more comprehensive curricula were framed. Cicero and Quintilian, for example, in demanding that the orator be able to handle all subjects as need arises, virtually prescribe the broadest training. Quintilian and Vives mapped out in detail very

formidable courses of study. But most of the early Italian humanists counselled moderation, and sought their ends in a careful selection of subjects rather than through the inclusion of all. This, however, seemed hardly adequate for English youth; for, as Sir Thomas Elyot pointed out, his countrymen were handicapped by having no natural start in the most essential languages, Latin and Greek. Hence the demands of educators became more and more unreasonable, especially in the seventeenth century when the old zeal for mental and spiritual culture was displaced by a faith in knowledge as knowledge. To teach everybody everything, I believe, was the goal of Comenius' endeavors.

Of the many early writers on education Quintilian was really the first to go beyond general principles to a definite scheme of instruction. He laid out a most inclusive curriculum, but insisted that it could be carried out, since the human mind by nature is busy and active and in the young suffers little from fatigue. "Writing is relieved by reading, and the tedium of reading itself is relieved by changes of subject."¹⁶ Quintilian was directly followed by two great humanists, Erasmus and Vives. Vives, especially, is of importance for the student of Milton, since his treatise, *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, has been called the direct source of Milton's work.¹⁷

The two treatises are in certain respects alike. Vives, for instance, defined the general aim of education, as Milton did, in the language of the church. Vives also insisted that education must begin with sense experience, and that the study of language is not an end in itself but simply a tool for the attainment of knowledge. On this principle he outlined fully a course of study from which Milton might have derived most that he prescribed. In the study of agriculture, for example, Vives recommended six authors, of whom Milton retained three. And Vives stressed, too, the need of exercise, laid down rules governing diet, and described completely the organization of his school. Possibly this cumulative evidence will warrant the assumption that Milton drew many of his ideas directly from the *De Tradendis Disciplinis*.

To offset these similarities between Milton's plan and Vives,

¹⁶ *Institutes*, I. 12, pp. 92-93.

¹⁷ Foster Watson: *A Suggested Source of Milton's Tractate, Nineteenth Century*, 66, pp. 607-617. 1909.

however, marked differences appear. Vives' course of classical reading is so much more full than Milton's that the correspondences are obscured. For instance, Vives gave a bibliography for advanced philology, which Milton was not concerned with. Furthermore, Vives emphasized his divergence from classical authority and tradition, and seemed more suspicious of the wholesomeness of pagan literature than Milton ever was. Again, Vives recommended modern writers in history and poetry; for among them "there are many not less worthy of being known and read than the majority of Greek and Latin historians." He strongly disapproved, too, of war and would have stricken from Milton's curriculum the daily exercise in arms that it provided for. And Vives believed thoroughly in the value of direct observation of nature, whereas Milton trusted largely to book knowledge. Physics was to be taught in Milton's school "out of some not tedious writer," and even agriculture was to be learned from books; for if occasionally hunters, fowlers, shepherds, or fishermen came to the school to tell their "helpful experiences," the boys would gain "a real tincture of natural knowledge." Others besides Milton had this full trust in the adequacy of book learning. Sir Thomas Elyot had asked of Virgil: "What ploughe man knoweth so moche of husbandry as there is expressed? who, delitynge in good horsis, shall nat be therto more enflamed, reding there of the bredyng, chesinge, and keypyng, of them? In the declaration whereof Virgile leaueth farre behynde hym all breders, hakney-men, and skosers."¹⁸ To this conclusion neither Vives nor Comenius would have subscribed.

Such contrasts are certainly as striking as the resemblances between the two books, and the evidence hardly warrants a verdict. That Milton had read Vives' work one willingly believes who knows the poet's eclecticism of mind. But, if we grant Milton the ideas that language is only the means to knowledge, and that the classical literatures are the richest storehouses of literary, philosophical, and scientific treasure, ideas that he could have gathered from almost any Italian humanist, we must expect many correspondences between the reading-lists compiled by the two men. The likelihood is, that Vives is only one of the "old, renowned authors" whose ideas Milton had thoroughly assimilated in forming his own theory.

¹⁸ *Governour*, 1, 10.

In general three lines of influence converged to form Milton's *Tractate*. There was first the broadly outlined philosophy of the ancients. Of these thinkers only the late Roman, Quintilian, elaborated his plan with any degree of definiteness. Secondly, the ideas of the early Renaissance controlled Milton's thought to a marked degree. French civilization meant nothing to him. He even commended his young friend, Richard Jones, for "despising the luxuries of Paris" to hasten on to Italy, as Milton himself had done, where he "might enjoy the pleasures of literature and the conversation of the learned."¹⁹ "The monsieurs of Paris," he complained, "take our hopeful youth into their slight and prodigal custodies, and send them over, back again, transformed into mimics, apes, and kickshaws."²⁰ But the early humanism of Italy and Spain and the later revival of learning in Tudor England, most finely exemplified in the writings of Vergerius, Aeneas Sylvius, Vives, Erasmus, Sir Thomas Elyot, and Roger Ascham, contributed the second influence to the formation of Milton's theories.²¹ Lastly, the treatises of practical English teachers, especially those who carried on the high traditions of the Renaissance, lent to Milton's tract at least a portion of its realization of the needs of the time.

The Renaissance in England had enriched the minds and guided the energies of various types of men. More was primarily the statesman; Spenser, the poet; and Ascham and Mulcaster, teachers. The *Scholemaster* has left a vivid impression of the genial, broad-minded Roger Ascham; but of Richard Mulcaster, unfortunately, the world knows less. As headmaster of the Merchant Taylors' School for twenty-five years and of St. Paul's for twelve, he gained wide experience in his profession. Hence he did not defer to authority as Milton was apt to do. "It is no proof," he said, "that because Plato praiseth something, because Aristotle approveth it, because Cicero commends it, because Quintilian or anyone else is acquainted with it, therefore it is for us to use. . . . He that will deal with writers so as to turn their conclusions to the use of his country must be very well advised."²² But Milton may have

¹⁹ *Familiar Letters*, 25. 1657.

²⁰ *Education*, P. W., 3, p. 478.

²¹ A fine study of Italian humanism, with several texts and bibliography, is found in Woodward's *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators*.

²² *Educational Writings of Richard Mulcaster*, p. 9.

derived something of his trust in method from Mulcaster. He had faith that, if a right method could be instituted, "the scholar would not learn anything he ought to forget, or leave anything needful unlearned."²³ To an equal degree Milton stressed the proper ordering of studies. Mulcaster, however, trusted less extensively than Milton did to a knowledge gained from books. And with a democratic spirit that Milton shows nothing of in the *Tractate*, Mulcaster preferred the day school to the boarding school; he disapproved of foreign travel, in which he saw "danger to health, to life, to conduct"; and he believed that the sons of gentlemen should enjoy no advantages denied to poor men's sons, since "their minds are the same as those of the common people, and their bodies are often worse."²⁴ So the theories of the two men diverged, owing to differences of temperament and profession; but Mulcaster, too, was a follower of the higher ideals of the Renaissance, and on broader issues they will be found in hearty accord.

John Brinsley, an early seventeenth-century London teacher, had less of the Renaissance spirit than either Mulcaster or Ascham. Yet he wrote the dialogue of *Ludus Literarius* and the *Consolation for Our Grammar Schools* in a modest and truly liberal spirit. As a master in the lower schools he naturally laid first emphasis on instruction in "our owne English tongue" and in arithmetic, for many boys "almost ready to goe to the University . . . can hardly tell you the numbers of pages, sections, chapters or other divisions in their books." He believed, too, that pupils should "learne only such bookes and matters, as whereof they may have the best use," and that the curriculum should be so arranged that "the things taught before do euer giue light to those that follow after."²⁵ But he had had enough experience to realize that no one method can be prescribed for all teachers: "the varietie of teaching is diuerse, and alwayes will be, for that euerie Schoolmaister liketh that which he knoweth & seeth not the vse of that which he knoweth not."²⁶ Such charity toward his fellow workers as well as his general modesty were due to the fact that he had "trauelled chiefly for our meaner & ruder schooles." Seemingly, he recog-

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 66.

²⁵ *Consolation*, p. 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

nized the differences between his own professional status and Mulcaster's or Ascham's; he would not have counted Milton, we suspect, other than an amateur in the profession. Nevertheless, all these English scholars were working with one fixed principle in mind, and all, in one way or another, voiced Brinsley's sentiment: "what maketh a nation to be a glorious nation, but that the people are a wise and an understanding people."²⁷

The historical affiliations of Milton's treatise are plainly revealed in its most famous sentence: "I call therefore a complete and generous education, that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." This noble definition had its prototypes in the philosophy of the Greeks, the Italian humanists, and Tudor Englishmen. The chief aim of education, as Plato and Aristotle conceived it, was the rearing of citizens. From another great classical authority, Cicero, the early Italian humanists were fond of quoting the statement, "virtutis laus omnis in actione constitit." This was simply amplified by Aeneas Sylvius in the words: "the true praise of men lies in doing, and that consequently all ingenious trifling, however harmless in itself, which withdraws our energies from fruitful activity, is unworthy of the true Citizen."²⁸ Equally significant is the definition of Vergerius: "we call those studies liberal which are worthy of a free man; those studies by which we attain and practise virtue and wisdom; that education which calls forth, trains, and develops those highest gifts of body and mind which ennoble men, and which are rightly judged to rank next in dignity to virtue only."²⁹ The idea was then carried into northern Europe by men like Erasmus, who believed that education should prepare men for social service. Sir Thomas Elyot, also, hoped that proper schooling would render Englishmen "of so excellent wisdom that throughout all the world should be found in no common weal more noble counsellors."³⁰ That was Mulcaster's hope, too; "the end of education and training is to help nature to her perfection in the complete development of all the various powers. . . . Whereby each shall be best able to perform

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁸ *De Liberorum Educatione*, Woodward's ed. p. 155.

²⁹ *De Ingeniis Moribus*, Woodward's ed., p. 102.

³⁰ *Gouverneur*, p. 289.

all those functions in life which his position shall require, whether public or private, in the interest of his country in which he was born, and to which he owes his whole service."³¹ This last statement of the principle brings one close indeed to Milton's actual words. And had authority been demanded for his nobly-framed definition, true eclectic that he was, he could have cited the master minds of Greece, the leaders of the early Renaissance, and some of the most gifted of his own countrymen.

However formal or barren, then, academic life may have become, especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the cultural aim of the true Renaissance was never wholly forgotten. That the real justification of a liberal education is the full rounding out of character, preparatory to efficient, unselfish public service, was the guiding principle of the early humanists. And even as formalism tightened its grip on the schools, liberal thinkers constantly revived the earlier ideals.

The best known advocate of this courtly training was of course Montaigne. In the interesting essay *Du Pedantisme*, he took issue squarely with pedantry. "We labour and toil and plod to fill the memory, and leave both understanding and conscience empty." "See but one of these our university men or bookish scholars return from school," he complains, "after he hath spent ten or twelve years under a pedant's charge: who is so unapt for any matter? who so unfit for any company? who so to seek if he come into the world?" He fails to see how it can become a gentleman to be "fast-tied, and as it were labouring fourteen or fifteen hours a day poring on his book, as some do, as if he were a day-labouring man." Montaigne, instead, "would have this world's frame to be my scholar's chief book"; for "the good that comes of study (or at least should come) is to prove better, wiser, and honester."

Social position and temperament alike contributed largely to the determination of Montaigne's prejudices. He inherited from Rabelais something of this dislike for scholastic discipline, and the insurgent spirit was in the air. Hence Montaigne's influence counted heavily toward reform. The courtly academy took firm root as a French institution, where riding, dancing, fencing, languages, history, and political philosophy were taught to young princes. For the imparting of this same culture the Ritterakade-

³¹ *Educational Writings of Richard Mulcaster*, p. 237.

mien were founded in Germany, and in 1650 Sir Balthazar Gerbier established such an institution in London, that young English gentlemen might no longer need to travel to France for their courtly training.

But Milton esteemed the French too little to be influenced by their reforms. He was more directly reached by the courtly training recommended by the Italian humanists and transplanted from Italy to England by Ascham, Sir Thomas Elyot, and Bacon. Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Gouernour* shows what that Italian-born ideal came to be in its new home.

In general, Sir Thomas Elyot expressed the sentiments of a high-minded courtier. Like Milton in the *Tractate*, he was concerned only with "the fourmynge the gentill wittes of noble mennes children." Consequently, he deprecated "that pestiferous opinion, that great learned men be inapt to ministration of things of weighty importance," and he demanded of the schools "men of so excellent wisdom that throughout all the world should be found in no common weal more noble counsellors." To that end he advocated the broadest physical and mental training. But he advised strongly that no subject be pursued farther than courtly life and public service may require. Even a fine art like music became in his eyes illiberal if too great skill is exacted and acquired. And he valued geography, history, and painting for their practical usefulness in the affairs of life. Yet in his enthusiasm for culture—"the most swete and pleasant redinge of olde autours"—he was a true child of the Renaissance. In Homer he found the best lessons for young gentlemen, and in Plato, "incomparable swetenesse of wordes and matter"; for he felt nothing of Vives' fear of pagan authors. Like the author of the *Areopagitica* he was trustful of man's readiness to choose the good; "no wyse man entreth in to a gardein, but he sone espiethe good herbes from nettiles, and treadeth the nettiles under his feete whiles he gadreth good herbes."² Such a union of courtliness and true love of learning was diametrically opposed to the pedantry of the early schools.

The sources of Sir Thomas Elyot's work may be easily traced. Both he and Castiglione, to prove that letters are a credit to a prince, cite the fondness of Scipio for the *Cyropaedia*. Castiglione,

² *Gouernour*, p. 13; *Areopagitica*, P. W., 2, p. 68.

too, recommends painting for its usefulness in the conduct of military operations. Other Italian humanists, also, left a traceable influence on the *Gouverneur*. Among them Professor Woodward mentions, Matteo Palmieri, Francesco Patrizi, Aeneas Sylvius, and Macchiavelli. Their ideal of a courtly education for public service, so persuasively set forth by Sir Thomas Elyot, could not be forgotten. In an anonymous tract, *The Institution of a Gentleman*, published in 1555, a gentleman is defined as "a man fit for the wars and fit for the peace." In another tract, *Queen Elizabeth's Academy*, written in 1572 by the great explorer, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Milton's famous definition is again anticipated in the phrase, "matters of action meet for present practice, both of peace and war."³³ The courtly ideal had indeed taken firm root in England.

The need for trained men was seemingly greater in Milton's time, especially in his own party, than it had been when Sir Humphrey Gilbert wrote. The universities, for which Milton had never full respect, were in 1644 in the hands of the Royalists. Oxford was the refuge of King Charles, and Cambridge, only a little later, expelled twelve heads of colleges and almost two hundred fellows. The war, also, was then turning against the Puritans. When Milton penned the *Tractate*, Cromwell had not yet proved his power of leadership, and the Parliamentary cause seemed liable to shipwreck. The need for true soldiers and far-seeing statesmen was imperative, and Milton felt that England's schools had been remiss in preparing the youth of the country for the crisis. He himself had been taught the use of weapons, and he insisted on early military training.³⁴ For the times demanded of men "firm hearts in sound bodies to stand and cover their stations, rather than to see the ruin of our protestation, and the inforcement of a slavish life."³⁵ With the right training the English youth would be "stirred up with high hopes of living to be brave men, and worthy patriots, dear to God, and famous to all ages"; and in times of war there would step forth "renowned and perfect commanders in the service of their country."³⁶

³³ Woodward, *Studies in Education*, pp. 296 ff.

³⁴ *Contemporary Life of Milton*, ed. Lockwood, p. xxxv.

³⁵ *Apology*, P. W., 3, p. 113. Read the account of his early life, pp. 110-122.

³⁶ *Education*, P. W., 3, pp. 468, 477.

The Puritans felt the want of trained men most urgently after the cessation of hostilities, when the reorganization of the state taxed Cromwell's powers to the utmost. "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war." So Milton, in the eloquent admonition of the *Second Defence*, warned Cromwell that the cares and dangers of peace "are exertions compared with which the labour of war is mere pastime."³⁷ To prepare men for such service had been the poet's earliest aim as an educator; for he had included political science among the studies of his model school, that men "may not, in a dangerous fit of the commonwealth, be such poor, shaken, uncertain reeds, of such a tottering conscience, as many of our great counsellors have lately shewn themselves, but steadfast pillars of the state."³⁸ The same distrust of England's statesmanship was expressed again in his trenchant review of the Long Parliament's career.³⁹ He felt that England was "fruitful enough of men stout and courageous in war," but "not over-fertile of men able to govern justly and prudently in peace." His countrymen seemed lacking in "civility, prudence, love of the public good"; they were "valiant indeed, and prosperous to win a field; but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious and unwise: in good or bad success, alike unteachable." Milton even ventured to suggest that, because their country was without the warm sun that "ripens wits as well as fruits," England would have to learn the "civil virtues" in southern lands.

For the rearing of public men, able to guide the country in war and peace, the *Tractate* was designed. Naturally, the author's chief concern was the nurture of gentlemen's sons. But it does not follow that he cared nothing for the education of the common people, and in other tracts he pleaded eloquently for that. Milton's first prose treatise, *Of Reformation in England*, is dominated by the ideal of a people universally educated. At the Reformation, he argued, the Bible had been "sought out of the dusty corners where profane falsehood and neglect had thrown it, the schools opened, divine and human learning raked out of the embers of forgotten tongues." The English people, therefore, were to be reproached for relinquishing to the bishops "the earnest

³⁷ *P. W.*, 1, p. 290.

³⁸ *Education, P. W.*, 3, p. 472.

³⁹ *History of Britain, P. W.*, 5, pp. 239-240.

study of virtue and godliness, . . . and the search of divine knowledge." For the Fathers had "sent all comers to the Scriptures," believing that its essential parts were not too difficult for the common man. Thus the whole argument rests on the assumption of adequate training of all men. The world-old truth was expressed again, and eloquently, in the passage: "to govern well is to train up a nation in true wisdom and virtue, and that which springs from thence, magnanimity, . . . and that which is our beginning, regeneration, and happiest end, likeness of God. . . . This is the true flourishing of a land, other things follow as the shadow does the substance."⁴⁰

Even more plainly Milton's last two tracts, written in 1659 and 1660, urge the necessity of universal education. In the *Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, a nation's safety is said to lie in making "the people fittest to choose, and the chosen fittest to govern." To this end the citizens "should have here also schools and academies at their own choice, wherein their children may be bred up in their own sight to all learning and noble education; not in grammar only, but in all liberal arts and exercises." Such conditions would communicate "the natural heat of government and culture more distributively to all extreme parts, which now lie dumb and neglected; would soon make the whole nation more industrious, more ingenious at home, more potent, more honourable abroad."

The same plea for universal education had been advanced in Milton's argument of the preceding year for a purely voluntary church. Such a church can exist only if the people as a whole are soundly educated. Consequently, the author proposed "to erect in greater number, all over the land, schools, and competent libraries to those schools, where languages and arts may be taught free together." Those who were so taught, "freely at the public cost," and given a "competence of learning," especially if "an honest trade" were included in the training, would make in the end ample return for the opportunities afforded them.

No one who examines all these various passages will regard the treatise *Of Education* alone as a complete statement of Milton's

⁴⁰ *P. W.*, 2, pp. 367, 378, 384, 387, 390-391.

⁴¹ *P. W.*, 2, pp. 124, 126, 136.

⁴² *The Likeliest Means*, *P. W.*, 3, pp. 26-27.

theories on England's schools. The work stands chronologically about midway between his open criticism of the traditions at Cambridge and the argument of these last two tracts. He wrote the *Tractate* without ostentation, but with a very obvious sense of his right to speak. Was he not well fitted, by actual experience as a teacher, by wide reading, especially in the treatises of the Italian humanists, and by a closely felt appreciation of the needs of the time, to claim authority? In this one work, prompted by the interest of Hartlib, Milton was concerned only with a particular type of school and the needs of a certain class. But already he had considered the needs of the nation as a whole. Then, as time went on and as the Puritans faced defeat,

On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compass round,

Milton seemed to have thought more of universal education and less of courtly training. A long passage in *Paradise Regained* on ancient literature might be taken to indicate a changed attitude toward the humanities. One suspects, however, that even in his last years he would still have urged on the sons of gentlemen much that same training that he had offered in 1644. But in late life the larger needs of the common people seemed to him the greater need. He still looked with reverence to the "old, renowned authors"; but he had learned lessons, too, in the school of experience. Viewed in this light, his proposed scholastic reforms assume a new importance. The *Tractate* was not an accidental effort, hastily put together to satisfy a friend. It marks only one stage of the author's endeavor to spread the benefits of education throughout England. His interest in the cause was lifelong, and his words on the subject, scattered here and there through his writings, represent his widest scholarship and his vital interest in the welfare of mankind.

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